



**NATIONWIDE CHILDREN'S**  
*When your child needs a hospital, everything matters.™*

## **Helping Hand™**

*Health Education for Patients and Families*

# **Cleft Palate – Starting Foods and Cups**

## **Starting foods**

You can introduce foods to children with an unrepaired cleft palate at around 6 months of age, just as in children without a cleft.

The following are some of the signs that your child may be ready for solid food:

- interest in watching others at mealtimes
- holds head up without support
- sits upright with light support
- leans forward to eat food
- keeps tongue in the mouth when offered food

Start by giving your baby slightly thicker foods without lumps, such as Stage 2 baby foods or thicker infant cereals. These help your child control the food in their mouth.

- Give foods with only one ingredient for a few days before starting any other flavors. This helps you to know if your child has a reaction.
- You do not need to use any special spoons or equipment to feed your baby foods.
- Watch your child carefully to make sure that they swallow each bite before giving them another spoonful. If your child does not seem to swallow a bite, try giving a dry spoon or a spoon with no food on it. This helps your baby swallow any food in the mouth.

## **Adding more textures**

At around 8 to 9 months of age, fork-mashed table foods (such as avocados and bananas), solids that melt (such as teething crackers) and soft solids (such as a small piece of boiled potato or cooked carrot pieces) can be started. You should watch your child very closely when starting any new food to make sure they are safe while eating.

Once your baby is eating melting solids and soft solids well, you can start giving small pieces of other table foods. This is typically around 10 to 12 months of age.

- Some foods should be NOT be given at this age. The following foods can cause choking in young children:
  - nuts and seeds
  - grapes
  - popcorn or chips
  - hard pieces of raw fruit or vegetables
  - hard or sticky candies
  - pieces of hot dog
  - tough meats (like, pork chops or steak)

Talk to your child's health care provider if you have any questions about when you should start certain foods or if a food is safe to give to your baby.

## **Food in the nose**

Since your child has a cleft of the palate, some foods may enter their nose while eating. Do not worry if this happens. If food enters their nose, it may be a little uncomfortable for your child. It usually gets cleared while eating, drinking or sneezing. Try to avoid wiping your child's face too often. This may upset your child. Mealtimes may be messy, but it is important for you to stay positive during feedings. If you are happy during the meal, your child will be too!

## **Drinking from a cup**

- You can start giving your child a cup around 6 months of age. Some signs your child is ready to start drinking from a cup include:
  - good head control
  - eating solid foods
  - sitting upright with little support
  - holding the cup and tipping it to drink
- Your child should use a free-flowing cup. This is a cup that does not need suction in order to drink the liquid. Free-flowing cups include an open cup or a soft spout sip cup that does not have a spill-proof valve or straw. Some examples of free-flowing cups include:
  - Nuby No-Spill™ Super Spout Cup
  - Philips Avent My Natural Drinking Cup
  - OXO Tot® Transitions Soft Spout Sippy or Training Cup
  - NUK® Learner Cup
  - Small open cups, such as the Dr. Brown's™ Bottle lid, a Dixie® cup, or a Nosey cup

There are many other cups that can be used when the spill-proof valve is removed. If using another cup, use one with a soft spout since the surgeons allow these cups after palate repair.

- When starting to use a cup, put in only a small amount of liquid. Give it to your child one time a day instead of a bottle. It is best to start with the first feeding in the morning since children are often most thirsty at this time. Once your child shows interest in the cup, increase the amount of liquid in the cup. Then, start to offer it more often during the day. The bottle given before bed is often the hardest to change to a cup, but your child may be different.

## **Getting ready for surgery**

Since your child will have feeding restrictions after a palate repair, continue to give baby foods or foods without lumps, such as applesauce and yogurt, even while advancing food textures. You should also continue to offer all drinking options, such as the bottle, free-flowing soft spout sip cups and open cups. These practices will help your child eat and drink soon after their palate is repaired and get discharged from the hospital quickly.

## **Problems with feeding or drinking**

Although most children with a cleft palate do well with starting solid foods, adding textures, and drinking from cups, some may have problems. If you have concerns with your child's eating or drinking, please contact the Cleft Lip and Palate Center. We can help make mealtimes more successful.

## **The Cleft Lip and Palate Center's helpline:**

If you notice problems with feeding or you are concerned with your child's growth, please call the Cleft Lip and Palate Center's nurse line during regular business hours from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday at (614) 722-6299.

After hours, on weekends or holidays, call (614) 722-2000. Ask to speak to the plastic surgeon on call.